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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 706th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 28 May 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CRC/C/3/Add.57 and Corr.1; CRC/C/Q/DRC/1 (list of issues); written replies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in French and English))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo resumed places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation to reply to the questions on special protection measures.

3. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that an international conference had been held to address the issue of the demobilization of child soldiers, following which the President of the Republic had signed a decree-law on 9 June 2000. Pursuant to the decree-law, an interministerial body had been created, staffed and financed by the various ministries concerned. With the assistance of UNICEF, investigators had been trained to seek out child soldiers in military camps. UNICEF, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the relevant ministries had carried out a preliminary study in the field in March 2001 with a view to establishing the psychosocial profile of child soldiers. The results of that study had been made public in April 2001.

4. Pursuant to a decree concerning the creation of a rehabilitation committee, shelters and welcome centres had been established to provide former child soldiers with an informal education. Children living in camps for displaced persons attended school in nearby villages and towns whenever it was impossible to set up schools within the camps themselves.

5. It had been asked why Tutsis had been grouped together in Kinshasa. In view of the prevailing climate of violence in the country, his Government had previously taken steps to protect Tutsis, but, since they had all returned to Rwanda, there were no longer any Tutsis in the capital.

6. Ms. MODUA (Democratic Republic of the Congo), referring to children whose rights had been violated in refugee camps, said that the Criminal Code contained provisions for the perpetrators of such acts to be punished. The offenders remained unpunished only in cases where they went undiscovered.

7. With support from the Government, which had made the infrastructure available, NGOs had set up schools to provide children living in refugee camps with access to education.

8. With the support of NGOs, the Government had submitted a draft bill with a view to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. It was therefore likely that the instrument would be ratified very shortly.

9. With regard to bringing national legislation into line with the definition of the child as any person below the age of 18 years, as contained in the Convention, draft bills had been drawn up with a view to amending existing laws. Nevertheless, although the legislation was still not in keeping with the Convention, the Convention was applicable because it took precedence over domestic law. Steps were also being taken to disseminate the Convention with a view to raising its profile among all sections of the population.

10. In an effort to combat child labour, which constituted a serious problem in the informal sector, where most excesses occurred, her country had ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour on 30 April 2001. It thus had an instrument enabling it to take legal action against the perpetrators of the crimes described in ILO Convention No. 182. Her Government would follow the Committee's advice and seek the ILO's assistance in order to implement the Convention.

11. Concerning efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children, since the Convention had been ratified, minors between the ages of 16 and 18 years had been considered as children and therefore benefited from enhanced protection. While pornography and the sale of and traffic in children were crimes punishable under the Criminal Code, incest had yet to be established as a specific crime, since it was considered by law as indecent assault. Since the definition was inadequate, there were plans to amend the legislation to make it more precise.

12. In response to allegations that street children were detained by police, she said that the existing law on begging and vagrancy was not applied and that only children committing offences were arrested. In such cases, the judicial authorities were informed of the arrest and subsequently asked for a social inquiry with a view to taking the appropriate steps, such as the placing of juvenile criminals in institutions. The treatment of those children was governed by decree D 50 on juvenile justice procedure. However, in areas not covered by the decree, children came under the jurisdiction of laws applicable to adults. There were nevertheless plans to draft a child protection code to fill those gaps, including provisions on the circumstances surrounding the offence being committed. The Government had also organized seminars in collaboration with NGOs in order to take stock of the situation concerning juvenile offenders.

13. A draft law had been submitted to the National Assembly for a vote to be held on the abolition of the death penalty. Pending the adoption of that law, the President of the Republic had issued a pardon to those awaiting execution. Children guilty of offences punishable by the death sentence were admitted to rehabilitation centres situated on the outskirts of the capital. Regarding the age of criminal responsibility, a draft amendment had been drawn up to the law currently in force, designed to ensure that juvenile offenders under the age of 16 years were considered legally irresponsible and were therefore referred to rehabilitation centres. The current situation was that the National Council for Children would intervene from time to time to prevent juvenile offenders from receiving the same treatment in the courts as adults.

14. Replying to allegations that minors could be held in pre-trial detention for up to two months, she said that, since the Convention had been ratified, such abuses no longer occurred because legal proceedings involving minors were required by law to be dealt with promptly. An NGO was currently building a juvenile prison so that children could be detained separately from adults and provided with protection from ill-treatment.

15. Ms. KENDA BAKAJIKA (Democratic Republic of the Congo), referring to child labour in the mines of Kasai and Katanga provinces, said that children worked there either because of poverty or because of the prospect of easy money. The Government had begun to implement programmes designed to take children out of the mines, in particular, literacy centres had been set up in the mines with the assistance of UNICEF and parents were encouraged, on one hand, to persuade their children not to go to work and, on the other, to send them to the centres. The NGO Save the Children had a similar programme designed to persuade children to stop working in the mines and return to school.

16. Regarding the demobilization of child soldiers, there were plans to carry out a programme to seek out and assess the needs of child soldiers in military camps. A workshop had been organized with the help of Save the Children in order to discuss the issue, which had led to the conclusion that children must make their own decision on demobilization and agree to leave the camps of their own accord. It was therefore necessary to establish transitional rehabilitation facilities for children and particularly for orphans. The issue was currently being examined by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

17. With regard to the sexual exploitation of children, a study would be carried out shortly by the Ministry of Social Affairs with a view to determining the scope of the problem and compiling statistics. Her country had taken part in the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm and would also take part in the second Congress, due to be held in Japan in December 2001. A programme for the prevention of ill-treatment and sexual violence against women had been developed in collaboration with WHO and some government officials had recently taken part in a seminar in Harare on the same issue.

18. The problem of street children was one of the Government's primary concerns. Given that the seriousness of the problem was closely linked to the issue of dysfunctional families, a campaign concerning the family, developed with the help of UNICEF, was due to be launched in June 2001. Values which ensured that orphans were traditionally taken care of by the extended family were gradually disappearing. The campaign was designed to raise the awareness of families of the important role they had to play in preventing the phenomenon of street children.

19. The results of a study carried out with the help of UNICEF had shown that very few children were registered, and that had serious consequences for inheritance rights. A public awareness campaign had therefore been launched in order to encourage families to register all of their members.

20. Mr. KAMBINGA SELE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that domestic law did not provide for the granting of Congolese nationality on a collective basis. Nationality could be acquired by individual request only.

21. Ms. PUTCHU KALIMA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, to prevent the sexual exploitation of children, her Government had established the National Observatory for the Monitoring of the Sexual Exploitation and Prostitution of Children, which was a significant step forward. Composed of representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Social Affairs, Education and Health, as well as from the police, press and NGOs active in the field of child protection, the Observatory had the task of denouncing all cases of sexual exploitation of children.

22. Following the study that revealed that large numbers of children were not on the civil register, the Government had launched an extensive public awareness campaign in 2000, designed to make families aware of the problem. In the context of International Women's Day 2001, her country had chosen the theme "women and the right to inheritance", with a view to raising awareness of the importance of registering marriages through the official channels. Too many women were ineligible to inherit from their husband because their marriage was merely de facto rather than de jure and because their names did not appear on the civil marriage register.

23. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the recruitment of children under the age of 18 years to the armed forces was prohibited by law and that legal proceedings would be taken against anyone breaking that law.

24. Mr. DOEK invited the members of the Committee to ask follow-up questions on the issues already covered, as well as questions concerning civil rights and freedoms, family environment, health and education.

25. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked whether the Government had considered providing extra support at school for children who failed to reach the required standards, with a view to assisting the rehabilitation of children who had formerly left school to become soldiers.

26. The mere fact that laws existed to protect children, for instance from sexual exploitation, prostitution, sale or abduction, did not always afford them the protection they needed. She asked whether the laws in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were applied correctly and whether they could be strengthened in any way. She would be interested to learn what happened to the criminal records of children who, having been condemned to death, were subsequently pardoned. She enquired whether the sentence was expunged from the record or whether the child remained stigmatized for life.

27. She welcomed the fact that, with regard to the demobilization of child soldiers, the State party offered children the chance to participate in their own rehabilitation. In her view, that was the only way that the process was likely to succeed.

28. Concerning the registration of births, a campaign to raise parents' awareness might not be sufficient, given that ignorance of the need to do so was not the only factor preventing people from registering births. Other factors might be responsible, such as the registration procedures used or even the distance people had to travel to reach civil registry offices.

29. It was stated in the report that private initiatives had been given responsibility for managing the administration of juvenile justice. She asked whether those initiatives took relevant international standards into account and whether any other progress had been made in that area.

30. It was regrettable that one of the protection measures described in the written replies in the context of the Government's efforts to promote peace was to assign child soldiers to tasks that did not involve the use of weapons. It meant that children continued to be used in conflicts, whereas the ultimate objective was to ensure that they were kept away from conflict areas.

31. Ms. AL-THANI asked whether, in view of the extremely high infant mortality rate, standing at 141 deaths for every 1,000 live births, the Government intended to take steps to resolve the problem. In the same context, she asked whether there were plans to combat the rapid spread of serious diseases like tuberculosis, poliomyelitis and meningitis. Although she welcomed the implementation of a national vaccination campaign in collaboration with UNICEF and WHO, she would like to know why only 60 per cent of the country's numerous health centres were equipped to carry out vaccinations on children.

32. Given the high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection, she asked whether the Government was aware of the damaging impact of the law prohibiting the promotion and distribution of condoms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

33. Disabled children failed to receive the care they needed and frequently found themselves excluded because of the belief that they practised witchcraft. Therefore the Government urgently needed to address the problem, for instance, by carrying out an extensive public awareness campaign.

34. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked whether children who failed to be registered at birth were entitled to enrol in school. If they were not, would it be possible to abolish that rule so that children could avoid being penalized and gain access to education? Given the large number of AIDS orphans, she would be interested to learn whether children left without a family were looked after by the State and whether the Government was taking steps to prevent the spread of the disease. Lastly, she asked what the delegation saw as the three priority areas for action over the next five years.

35. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that parents were prohibited from giving Christian names to their children by the Ordinance of 30 August 1972, which was inconsistent with the right to a name. She asked whether the Ordinance was still in force or whether it was now possible to give a child a name from any religion?

36. Pursuant to the law of 1981, nationality was no longer granted on a collective basis, but only to persons capable of proving that their ancestors had lived in Zaire since 1885. She asked whether that was a deliberate way of refusing nationality to a particular category of people.

37. In view of the significance of traditions which tended to restrict children's freedom of expression, she asked whether measures were being taken to encourage a change of attitude and make the child a subject of law.

38. She also wondered why the Government did not appear to be in favour of freedom of association and of peaceful assembly. Was that stance linked to the country's insecurity? Was the Government intending to take steps to enable children to play a democratic role in solving their own problems? Was the child's right to privacy guaranteed?

39. Regarding access to information, the report recognized the need to enrich the content of children's radio and television programmes. What measures was the State party considering to promote the development of the child? Did it plan to promote reading, for example? Did it

intend to increase the resources of the Board of Censorship so that it could combat the illegal and uncontrolled sale and distribution in rural areas of video cassettes containing violent or pornographic material which was harmful to the development of the child?

40. As to the ill-treatment of children, article 362, paragraph 4, of the Family Code authorized the person with paternal responsibility for the child to "reprimand and discipline the child insofar as that is consistent with the child's age and conducive to the improvement of his or her behaviour". That law could lead to excesses and she wondered whether there might not be other more acceptable forms of discipline which would take account of the principle of respect for the child's physical and moral integrity. Congolese children clearly had no civil remedies or the possibility of making themselves heard or reporting the violations committed against them. Did the State party therefore plan to make the system whereby children could report sexual abuse applicable to ill-treatment?

41. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that, according to reliable sources, it was difficult for human rights organizations to work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and freedom of association was not respected, whereas the Government claimed that it maintained good relations with NGOs. What was the true situation?

42. She also wished to know whether the Democratic Republic of the Congo had an overall policy on the family, children's education and the child's say in decisions affecting him or her within the family. The National Youth Council had been created to promote the principles embodied in the Convention and to draw up a new child recovery and reintegration policy, in particular for young demobilized soldiers. Had that policy been assessed and, if so, with what results?

43. Mr. CITARELLA pointed out that the framework law of 29 September 1986 on the national education system, which made education compulsory for boys and girls until the age of 15, had never entered into force. Had the Government established a plan to provide free primary education, as it was obliged to do as party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

44. Mr. DOEK, referring to the large number of AIDS orphans and hence of families headed by children, asked whether the Democratic Republic of the Congo had a specific programme to strengthen the role of the extended family in order to help not only such orphans, but also children who had been abandoned or who were experiencing hardship. Had the Government put in place a policy to assist the 500,000 to 1 million children of refugees and reunite them with their families? Were there any specific programmes, either internationally supported or otherwise, for integrating such children into Congolese society or returning them to their country of origin? It was essential to ensure that there was no ambiguity about whether they would return to their country of origin or settle in their host country, in which case they must be enrolled in school and have access to services such as social security.

45. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that the Family Code had established the system of bilineal kinship to replace patrilineal or matrilineal kinship, thereby bringing the family under the authority of the leader of the community. Did that not make for a situation in which parents could indirectly evade their parental responsibility and not have to make certain decisions concerning their own child?

46. She also regretted the fact that women had to obtain their husbands' consent before taking paid employment and that they received a lower salary during their maternity leave. Such provisions were contrary to those of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to women's rights in general.

47. She asked whether parenting courses were run to help young parents to look after their households and expressed concern about arranged marriages, dowries and the fact that marrying an uncle was permissible. Did the country intend to put an end to those practices?

48. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was not party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Had it nevertheless concluded corresponding bilateral agreements with neighbouring States?

49. With regard to the family, what did women's associations think of the Government's stated aim of legalizing the practice known as "bureaugamie" (unofficial polygamy) and what would be the status of children born in such circumstances? She also wondered how guardians were assigned to children deprived of a family environment, whether there was a mechanism to monitor such placements and whether the State provided any financial support for the child or the guardian. She would welcome additional information on the adoption procedure, post-adoption monitoring and the differences between national adoption and the supervisory guardian scheme. She also asked whether the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo intended to ratify the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

50. She noted that the law that penalized family abandonment had been repealed in 1987 and replaced by the Family Code, which did not provide for any such penalty. While the law did provide for alimony, she would like to know the details of the measures which had been adopted to ensure that it was paid. At first sight, those measures seemed inadequate, since they applied only to parents working in the formal sector in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. How did the authorities go about ensuring that other parents and, in particular, those working abroad fulfilled their alimony obligations for the children who had remained in the country?

51. Regarding health, she asked whether there was an official policy on breastfeeding and birth spacing. Given that, in rural and semi-urban areas, in particular, an increasing number of people relied on traditional medicine, she asked whether the Government had taken steps to improve those practices in terms of hygiene, dosages and organization with a view to protecting the population. Furthermore, as in many African countries, the illegal sale of medicines was widespread. What had the authorities done to protect children against such a potentially dangerous practice?

52. Lastly, she asked whether the authorities had taken steps to prevent accidents, particularly in classrooms, at the entrance to schools and on playgrounds, how they intended to protect teenagers against HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases and how they warned young girls of the risks of early pregnancy. Were young girls allowed to continue their schooling if they had had a child?

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.55 p.m.

53. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that her country was going through a very difficult period and that it was experiencing serious problems in helping displaced children involved in reintegration schemes catch up with their schooling. Nevertheless, the Government's prime concern was to keep them occupied and monitor their progress. Birth registration was also problematic. The authorities had launched awareness campaigns aimed at parents, on International Women's Day, for example, and were sparing no efforts in that area, even though the results were still not totally satisfactory. Still, access to schooling was not subject to the registration of a child's birth as there could be no question of them being made to pay for their parents' ignorance or negligence.

54. The children sentenced to death who had been pardoned by the head of State had been guilty of serious crimes. They were therefore not cleared of those crimes and were placed in corrective institutions before they could be returned to their families.

55. As far as health was concerned, her delegation could not accept the claims that the authorities did not take account of disabled children. The country had specialized institutions for blind or deaf children, for example. However, given the situation as a whole, bearing in mind the country's poverty and the fact that the entire population was going through a difficult period, there was no denying that the situation of disabled children could, of course, be improved. Another area in which the Government was sparing no effort was in attempting to lower the infant mortality rate and help the population prevent various diseases, including malaria. For example, the Government encouraged the population to buy mosquito nets soaked in insecticide to protect them from malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

56. Children were not banned from forming associations. In fact, a recent decree which liberalized the establishment of political parties and associations did not specify the age of the persons permitted to create such structures.

57. Mr. KAMBINGA SELE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Banyarwandas were, as their name indicated, Rwandans who had fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of the various conflicts that had plagued Rwanda. Many of them had remained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for several years and some had even studied there. One of them had become an adviser to former President Mobutu and had been instrumental in Mobutu's signing in 1978 a decree-law granting Congolese nationality to the whole of that refugee group. The Parliament had repealed the decree-law because it was unacceptable for Congolese nationality to be granted collectively. Congolese nationality was available to anyone, individually, subject to an application in due form and in compliance with Congolese law.

58. It was true that, with a view to promoting the use of traditional names, a 1973 law had indeed prohibited giving Christian names to children, but it had fallen into abeyance, even though no specific provision had been adopted to repeal it.

59. Ms. MODUA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, even though the administration of justice had been handed over to private facilities, the State still had a say in the

running of those facilities; that guaranteed compliance with national and international standards. For example, the case of juvenile offenders was handled by a two-tier system, respected the rights of the defence and the right to be assisted and represented and offered remedies.

60. It was true that, as the law stood, women on maternity leave received only three quarters of their salary and lost their entitlement to annual leave. Under the reforms being carried out, the Government intended to change the law so that women could continue to receive the whole of their salary during their maternity leave.

61. It was also true that the Board of Censorship lacked resources, but the authorities intended to give it fresh impetus through retraining programmes for its members and an increase in the resources allocated to it so that it could enforce the provisions of the Criminal Code which penalized the sale or distribution of potentially harmful goods.

62. Mr. KAMBINGA SELE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the victim of child abduction was first and foremost the entire population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, since, as had been recognized by the Human Rights Commission at its fifty-seventh session, it was Congolese children who were abducted by Ugandan and Rwandan troops. When he had last visited Geneva, the Health Minister had taken steps to ensure that pregnant HIV-positive women were cared for without charge with the help of UNAIDS in order to protect unborn babies.

63. Ms. PUTCHU KALIMA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the law prohibited the use of corporal punishment in schools and that awareness campaigns had been set up to initiate dialogue between parents and children in families so that children did not become victims of corporal punishment. There was also a plan to set up a domestic violence reporting office. The authorities were promoting family reunification to cater for the many unaccompanied children found in Government-controlled areas, as well as in the occupied territories. In that context, the Government relied on, amongst others, the Red Cross and UNOMC.

64. Mr. KAMBINGA SELE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Ministry of Health wanted to make effective use of the skills of traditional medicine specialists and was trying to organize a systematic way of monitoring their work. Resorting to traditional medicine was much cheaper than using modern medicines, and that was why people increasingly turned to such practices.

65. With regard to accident prevention, it was compulsory to have school insurance and, although the situation was not perfect, measures to guarantee the safety of children as they left school were taken with the assistance of the police and the Red Cross and the basics of the highway code were taught in schools.

66. Ms. KENDA BAKAJIKA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, by ratifying the Convention, her Government had shown that its intention was to provide free education. Moreover, the law expressly stipulated that primary education should be free and compulsory. With its international partners, including UNICEF, UNESCO and the European Union, her Government had devised strategies to restore educational infrastructures. It was also taking steps

to improve the training of primary school teachers and renew teaching materials for the long-term purpose of ensuring that instruction was of a high standard. At the same time, it was running awareness campaigns to ensure that children enrolled in and regularly attended school. To deal with the lack of resources, it planned to create a fund for education with the help of the World Movement for Children.

67. Her Government had launched a broad campaign to promote family cohesion and unity to ensure that children were given the standard of protection needed for healthy development. It was thus striving to redefine the social role of the family, identify the causes of the break-up of families in both urban and rural areas and promote a genuine social dialogue.

68. With regard to the reintegration of child soldiers, which was one of the tasks entrusted to the National Youth Council, the demobilization process was continuing and the State was taking steps to help children find their natural families or a foster family, as well as a job.

69. The National Immunization Days had been instituted to deal with a crisis situation, namely, the major fresh upsurge of poliomyelitis. Every year, a large scale mobilization and immunization campaign was organized. At the same time, a systematic immunization programme was being implemented in the country's 307 health centres.

70. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Government had programmes to combat and, more specifically, to prevent HIV/AIDS infection, in addition to its scheme to help pregnant HIV-positive women. He wished to have more information on the law prohibiting the use of contraception.

71. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that such a law existed, but was no longer enforced, particularly in view of the fact that the Government was now appealing to the population as a whole to protect itself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

72. Ms. KENDA BAKAJIKA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the law prohibiting the use of contraception had been adopted at a time when the Government's view had been that the birth rate should not be limited. Since that time, with the increase in the population and the emergence of the HIV/AIDS infection pandemias, the situation had changed and the law would be repealed so as not to undermine the Government's new demographic policy. With the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Ministry of Health ran a national programme to promote family planning and to combat HIV/AIDS infection and other STDs. Under that programme, aimed mainly at adolescents, facilities had been set up to help pregnant HIV-positive women and take care of AIDS orphans. On the radio and on television, information campaigns were broadcast in which HIV or AIDS victims, through their testimony, helped the population to become more aware of the reality of that illness

73. The CHAIRPERSON requested more specific information on the measures taken by the Government to ensure that adoptions were legal and, given the crisis besieging the country, to ensure that abducted children, particularly by Rwandan and Angolan forces, did not become victims of the slave trade.

74. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the children who had been taken by force to Rwanda and Uganda were still there. In Uganda, they were confined to camps where they underwent military training in order to be used to fight against their own country.

75. Ms. MODUA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that legal adoption was indeed rare in Congolese culture, but that it was officially regulated in the Family Code. For a child to be adopted, an application had to be submitted to the court, which handed down its ruling after a lengthy procedure involving a social investigation. Intercountry adoptions had to be approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The procedure also applied to children adopted by close relatives. The Government was thus trying to legalize the traditional practice whereby orphans were cared for by other members of the family. The prime purpose of the law was, again, to prevent abuse.

76. Ms. OUEDRAOGO commended the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the considerable efforts it was making, despite the difficult circumstances it faced, to amend legislation and give priority to health and education. She nevertheless requested that steps should be taken to disseminate the Convention more widely and to improve the training of persons who worked with and on behalf of children.

77. The demobilization of children had to continue and the help of the international community should be sought to stop the rebels and other groups from recruiting children.

78. She encouraged the Government to implement the recommendations on children made in the Stockholm Action Plan and those made by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women following the consideration of the Government's reports.

79. The Government had to continue to apply family protection measures and, in consultation with the various communities, devise means of making the population more aware of child protection issues in order to change attitudes towards corporal punishment in school, as well as within the family. The issue of police brutality had not been addressed, but the delegation had to ensure that steps were taken to combat that problem and train members of the police force.

80. Since the sides involved in the conflict had signed a peace agreement, the time had come to redirect financial resources, giving priority to basic social services and children's needs. The implementation of the measures provided for in the Convention could help a great deal with the rebuilding of the country and its development. She requested the delegation to ensure, on its return, that the report and the Committee's conclusions and recommendations were widely circulated.

81. Ms. EBAMBA BOBOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) thanked the Committee for acknowledging the major efforts that had been made to improve the situation of children despite all the problems her Government faced. She urged the Committee to approach the international community to encourage it to back up the meagre material and financial resources available to her country.

82. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee was aware of the problems encountered by the State party and was prepared to help it obtain all the assistance it needed from the international community for the purpose of the implementation of the Convention. He urged the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ratify, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the increase in the membership of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.